

BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONTROL: BACKGROUND

In recent decades the growing possibility of biological warfare spreading disease over large areas of the world has lent a powerful impetus to efforts to bring biological weapons under control. During the past year these efforts successfully culminated with the negotiation of a convention prohibiting biological and toxin weapons -- the first true disarmament measure of the post-World War II era. The convention was negotiated by the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) in Geneva and the United Nations General Assembly.

Shortly after his Administration took office, President Nixon ordered a review of US policy regarding chemical and biological warfare. On the basis of this study, the President made a statement on November 25, 1969, in which he renounced all biological methods of warfare and stated that henceforth the US program would be confined to research on strictly defined measures of defense, such as immunization. The Defense Department was instructed to draw up a plan for the disposal of existing stocks of biological agents and weapons.

On February 14, 1970, the White House announced the extension of the ban on biological weapons to cover toxins. (Toxins fall between biologicals and chemicals in that they act like chemicals but are ordinarily produced by biological or microbial processes.)

In his November 25, 1969 statement the President announced US support for the principles of a draft convention on biological warfare which had been proposed to the CCD by the United Kingdom. The UK draft convention prohibited the development, production, stockpiling, and use of biological weapons. At the suggestion of the US this draft was amended in 1970 to include a prohibition on toxins.

Throughout 1970 the United States gave active support to the British draft convention at the CCD and at the UN. However, the Soviets, their allies, and a number of other countries continued to insist on a single agreement banning both chemical and biological weapons.

The US and some of its allies pointed to the difficulty of adequately verifying a CW ban and said that negotiations should proceed on a BW ban where these problems did not arise. The US delegation at the CCD emphasized that unlike biological weapons, chemical weapons have been used in modern warfare. They are more predictable and controllable than biological weapons, and they form an important part of the arsenals of many states. Thus, only when countries can assure themselves that parties to an agreement are no longer developing, producing, or stockpiling chemical weapons will there be a sound basis for a reliable chemical warfare convention.

During the 1971 spring session of the CCD, the Soviets changed their approach and tabled a draft convention prohibiting the development, production, and stockpiling of biological weapons and toxins, but not chemical weapons.

After this important Soviet move it became possible to work out an agreed US-USSR text during the summer session of the CCD. In the ensuing discussions a number of CCD members favored strengthening the commitment to further negotiations on CW as well as the verification provisions of the draft. After the text had been modified by the acceptance of some of these changes, a consensus was reached at the end of September, and a draft BW convention was submitted to the 26th UN General Assembly for its consideration. The draft treaty was carefully reviewed by the General Assembly, where it gained broad approval. In his statement to the First Committee, US Ambassador Bush called it a "solid achievement, ... an achievement

that can eliminate the threat of the use of disease as a method of warfare. It is an agreement that is in the interests of all governments; it is in the interest of all mankind."

The draft convention was commended by the General Assembly on December 16, 1971, by a vote of 110-0-1. It is being signed today in Washington, London and Moscow. It will go into effect when ratified by 22 countries, including the three depositary states (U.S., U.K. and U.S.S.R.)

Among its provisions, the convention contains an undertaking by the parties to continue negotiations in good faith with a view to reaching early agreement on effective measures for a chemical weapons ban. In this connection, work has continued at the CCD toward solving the complex problems involved in a prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons. ACDA's research program in the field of chemical weapons has concentrated on solving the technical problems involved in verifying compliance with such a ban. This has included studies of the utility of economic controls in supporting the verification of a CW ban. In addition, ACDA personnel have conducted field studies concerned with transportation and storage of chemical agents and munitions and are continuing to monitor the US Army's destruction programs for chemical and biological weapons.

It is expected that measures to effect a ban on chemical weapons will continue to be a topic for discussions at the CCD in 1972. President Nixon resubmitted the Geneva Protocol of 1925 to the US Senate for its advice and consent to ratification

on August 19, 1970. The Protocol prohibits the use in war of "asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases and of bacteriological methods of warfare."

There are now 98 parties to the Protocol, including all of the NATO countries, Japan, the Warsaw Pact nations and Communist China. Although the US is not yet a party, it has supported the principles and objectives of the Protocol.